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ABSTRACT

This paper describes a secondary social science methods course with a lab component that was planned collaboratively by representatives of Nebraska Wesleyan University (Lincoln, Nebraska) and a local high school. The lab component meant that a university instructor taught a high school social studies course for a semester. The advantages of the program were that the preservice students had opportunities to plan, implement, and evaluate short-term and long-term teaching strategies while the university instructor had the opportunity to experience high school teaching again. Advantages for the high school included the provision of an additional certified teacher and opportunities for teachers and administrators to offer input into a college methods course. The teacher education students completed the regular 3 credit-hour methods course, observed the high school social studies teachers, planned and taught a 1-week computer simulation to a small group of students, led small group discussions, directed in-class writing assignments, and planned and taught a full week's lessons in U.S. history. Evaluation of the program indicated that students found the experience very beneficial and that the program should be continued. (Contains 28 references.) (JDD)

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IMPROVING PRESERVICE EDUCATION

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IMPROVING PRESERVICE EDUCATION

Introduction

The purpose of this presentation is to describe a collaborative planned social science methods course designed to improve preservice education. This presentation is divided into three sections. The first section describes the planning process. The second section summarizes the current program. The last section focuses on the results of the program.

Based on a review of the literature and discussions with a number of university professors who were developing community-university experiences for prestudent teachers, a collaborative planned lab component was added to a secondary social studies methods course. The lab component differed somewhat from other collaborative efforts described in the literature in that the university instructor opted to teach a high school social studies course in a high school for a semester. This framework provided a number of advantages for the university and the high school.

It provided two important advantages for the university. First, it provided better opportunities for meaningful learning experiences for prestudent teachers. The component not only allowed preservice students to plan short and long term teaching strategies, it also allowed them to implement the strategies and evaluate them.

Second, it provided the university instructor with the opportunity to experience high school teaching again. This experience helped the instructor to present more relevant applications of educational theories to the college classroom by applying those theories to the high school classroom. This also allowed the university instructor to serve as a role model for teacher educators.

The framework not only provided excellent learning opportunities for the prestudent teachers and university instructor, it also provided a number of advantages for the high school. The lab component provided the high school with another certified teacher. This allowed the high school to offer another elective course for students interested in the social sciences.

This framework provided high school administrators and teachers with professional growth opportunities. It provided them with opportunities for input into a college methods course by providing them with planning and teaching opportunities.

Finally, the lab component provided the high school with additional sources. This provided additional assistance with curriculum development.

Planning

Planning for the lab component began in the Fall, 1986. First, individual informal discussions were initiated with the high school superintendent, principal and university department head. Based on their input, a formal proposal was written and presented to the high school superintendent. This proposal outlined individual and institutional responsibilities. It also contained a preliminary budget.

After the superintendent approved the proposal, it was sent to the university department head. After the department head approved the concept, discussions were initiated with the university business affairs staff. Some of the items discussed with the business office included liability insurance and transportation issues. Written statements related to these issues were included in the final proposal.

At the same time, discussions were conducted with the high school principal. These discussions focused on teaching certificates, North Central

Accreditation guidelines, school curriculum guidelines, discipline policies and budget guidelines. The proposal was then finalized and sent to the high school and university for approval.

After the document was approved, the principal and university instructor formed a small action team. This team designed the specific learning activities and directed the project.

Program

The lab component was implemented in the Fall, 1987. Initially, the component called for the university instructor to teach a senior level elective course called U.S. Economic History. The methods students were required to plan the course in the methods class. They were also required to spend eight hours observing the high school social studies teachers and spend 12 hours assisting/teaching the high school class.

The methods students were also required to complete the regular three credit hour methods course. This course focused on the usual methods topics as well as providing time to plan and practice the teaching techniques to be used in the high school. The methods class provided a nonthreatening environment for feedback on techniques. The high school principal assisted with teaching the course.

This format changed over time. Due to student feedback and changing high school staffing needs, the observation time was decreased and the actual teaching time increased to approximately 20 clock hours. The course taught was changed to a junior level required U.S. History survey course. This change provided a more realistic learning experience for the methods students and allowed more free time for a high school staff member to complete other administrative and curriculum responsibilities.

Under this structure, the university students began teaching within three weeks of the beginning of the semester. The methods students were required to plan and teach a one week computer simulation. Each methods student was assigned four high school students. The methods students directed the simulation and debriefing sessions.

The methods students were also required to lead small group discussions or direct in class written assignments with eight high school students twice during the next two weeks. By the end of the first eight weeks, each methods student had directed the whole class in at least one activity.

The methods students were then required to plan and teach for one full week and assist with the planning for a second week. They were expected to observe the other methods students.

Results

A number of measurements were taken to assess the effectiveness of the lab component. The measurements included philosophy statements, video-tapes, observations, questionnaires and assessments by the building principal.

All methods students that completed the methods course during the past nine years were required to write a philosophy paper during the first four weeks of the course. They were assigned to explain the purpose of social studies in public schools, identify key social studies goals, list the attitudes, concepts and skills to be taught as well as how to teach them and justify their beliefs. At the end of the methods course, students were given the option to rewrite their philosophies.

The students were divided into two groups, those that did not complete the lab component and those that did complete the component. Students

completing the course in 1984, 1985, 1986 and 1989 did not complete the lab component (N=22). Students completing the course in 1987, 1988, 1990, 1991 and 1992 (N=23), completed the lab component. Student papers were grouped accordingly and analyzed in terms of numbers of changes, overall length and quality of statements.

The students without the lab component experience made very few changes in their papers. Only six students made changes in their papers. Only one student in this group made substantial changes. This student was student teaching while completing the methods course. The other five only responded to instructor comments related to clarity and spelling.

Twenty-two students in the lab group made changes in their philosophies. On average these students added one to two new goals to their papers and lengthened their papers by one to two pages. The new goal statements were clearer and more balanced between attitude, content and skill development. Original goals seemed to be predominately content or skill orientated.

These students became more student-centered. They stated the need for using a variety of teaching models and became much more concerned with selecting relevant topics. For example, one methods student stated, "My week at Pius told me that while lecture worked well, I seemed to lose them if I didn't include them regularly. I need to use different types of teaching methods to keep them interested. I must make sure that the information they are receiving makes sense to them and they can apply it." These students also mentioned using specific activities or curriculum materials, such as Tom Snyder simulations, to achieve certain goals.

Video-tapes were also used to assess student changes. Students were taped in the methods course while demonstrating teaching models. They reviewed the

tapes before teaching in the high school and eventually were able to compare their demonstrations with their high school performance and student teaching performance during the next semester.

A number of observations were made throughout the semester. It was interesting to observe the methods students as they came together to plan and support each other. They were not required to team plan. However many times they did team plan, team teach and observe others as a show of support. They would car pool together and discuss "strategy" on a daily basis.

All students who participated in the lab experiences were interviewed concerning their experiences at the end of the semester and at the end of their student teaching experience. All twenty-three students that completed the lab component reported that the lab component was their most beneficial teaching experience. The sixteen students who have completed student teaching at this point highly recommend keeping the component.

Graduates were interviewed two months into their first teaching positions. They all reported that the week teaching was their most important methods course lab experience. All students vividly recalled their first day of teaching. Basically the insecurities encountered during the first weeks of student teaching were transferred to the lab experience. Experiencing the insecurities in a relatively safe environment assisted the students in relaxing and planning for student teaching.

The Classroom Environment Scale and principal observations were also used to assess the high school classroom. CES scores compared favorably to national norms and the principal consistently rated the course as beneficial for the high school students.

This collaboration will continue next year. The lab component will continue as it is currently structured. The principal and university instructor will focus on developing more staff development opportunities for the high school staff.

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